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SUBJECT: HONDURAS FAA TECHNICAL REVIEW SURPRISINGLY POSITIVE

1. A Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) technical review of Honduras' civil aviation oversight authority (General Directorate of Civil Aviation, or DGAC) was "85 percent positive," opening up the possibility of Honduras moving to Category 1 in the FAA's International Safety Assessments (IASA) program, which would allow Honduras to fly national air carriers directly to the U.S. as early as January 2006. Direct flights would give the limited number of Honduran carriers more control over the growth and development of key tourism areas, including the Caribbean Bay Islands and developing resorts in the northern coast city of Tela. A previous (and unsuccessful) technical review was held in 1994.

2. Three FAA inspectors arrived October 15 for the five-day DGAC review, held mainly in Tegucigalpa, but which included a day trip to La Ceiba. The inspectors focused on legal structure, training, processes and procedures, and licensing. Outstanding issues included a potential conflict between some DGAC guidelines and Honduran law; a request to separate the accident investigation function from DGAC responsibilities; requirement of certain standards for testing pilots; and the need to bring or train an inspector for two older jets currently in inventory.

3. In La Ceiba, the investigators reviewed the administration of three carriers - Islena (owned by TACA), AeroHonduras (which currently flies using wet-leased planes and crew from the U.S. company Falcon Air), and Atlantic Airlines. Of the three, Atlantic was clearly in need of the most work - issues raised included the lack of company flight manuals and a need for generally stronger administrative processes. Another review will be conducted the week of December 5th by the fourth investigator who was unable to attend this session. According to Minister of Transportation Jorge Carranza, if Atlantic is not in compliance by that review, they face the strong possibility of being grounded.

4. A comprehensive review of all items in need of compliance should arrive in the DGAC by mid-November, according to the FAA investigators. During the December review, which will focus mainly on air worthiness, the FAA will also check to see if the items mentioned in the first report have been addressed. This modified report will be circulated within the FAA, with a decision on whether Honduras is to be certified as Category 1 expected in January 2006.

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